

The President's Radio Address *December 7, 1996*

Good morning. This week I had the honor of lighting both the national Christmas tree and the national menorah. Both are symbols of a time of year filled with joy, hope, and expectation, a time, too, when we reflect on what we've done and what is left to do, a time to honor our obligations to family and community.

Last summer we made a new beginning on one of our Nation's most vexing problems, the welfare system. When I signed the historic welfare reform law, we set out to honor a moral obligation for our Nation, to help many people in our national community to help themselves. This law dramatically changes the Nation's welfare system so that no longer will it fail our people, trap so many families in a cycle of dependency, but instead will now help people to move from welfare to work. It will do so by requiring work of every able-bodied person, by protecting children, by promoting parental responsibility through tougher child support enforcement.

We've worked a long time to reform welfare. Change was demanded by all the American people, especially those on welfare who bore the brunt of the system's failure. For decades now, welfare has too often been a trap, consigning generation after generation to a cycle of dependency. The children of welfare are more likely to drop out of school, to run afoul of the law, to become teen parents, to raise their own children on welfare. That's a sad legacy we have the power to prevent. And now we can.

I came to office determined to end welfare as we know it, to replace welfare checks with paychecks. Even before I signed the welfare reform bill, we were working with States to test reform strategies, giving 43 States waivers from Federal rules to experiment with reforms that required work, imposed time limits, and demanded personal responsibility. And we were toughening child support enforcement, increasing collections by 50 percent over the last 4 years. That's about \$4 billion.

We were determined to move millions from welfare to work, and our strategy has worked. I am pleased to announce today that there are now 2.1 million fewer people on welfare than

on the day I took the oath of office. That is the biggest drop in the welfare rolls in history.

Some of these reductions have been even more striking. The welfare rolls have dropped 41 percent in Wisconsin, 38 percent in Indiana—two States where we granted landmark waivers to launch welfare reform experiments.

Throughout the country we're working to make responsibility a way of life, not an option. That means millions of people are on their way to building lives with the structure, purpose, meaning, and dignity that work gives. And that is something to celebrate.

But this is just the beginning of welfare reform. We had a choice: We could have gone on as we had with a system that was failing, or start anew to create a system that could give everyone who's able-bodied a chance to work and a chance to be independent. We chose the right way: first, working over the last 4 years with the States to reform their own systems, then passing a new welfare reform law requiring even more change in every State and every community.

But there is still much to do, and it now falls to all of us to make sure this reform works. The next step is for the States to implement the new law by tailoring a reform plan that works for their communities. As required by the law, we have already certified new welfare reform plans for 14 States. Today I'm pleased to announce we're certifying welfare for four more States: California, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Alabama. All their plans will require and reward work, impose time limits, increase child care payments, and demand personal responsibility. And across the board, as we give welfare funds back to the States, we will protect the guarantees of health care, nutrition, and child care, all of which are critical to helping families move from welfare to work. And we'll continue to crack down on child support enforcement.

Welfare as we knew it was a bad deal for everyone. We're determined to create a better deal. We want to say to every American, work pays. We raised the minimum wage; we expanded the earned-income tax credit to allow the working poor to keep more of what they

earn. Now we have to create a million jobs for people on welfare by giving businesses incentives to hire people off welfare and enlisting the private sector in a national effort to bring all Americans into the economic mainstream. We have to have help from the private sector.

Together we can make the permanent underclass a thing of the past. But we have a moral obligation to do that through welfare reform, working together in our communities, our businesses, our churches, and our schools. Every organization which employs people should consider hiring someone off welfare, and every State ought to give those organizations the incentives to do so, so that we can help families

reclaim the right to know they can take care of themselves and their own obligations.

Our future does not have to be one with so many people living trapped lives. The door has now been opened to a new era of freedom and independence. And now it's up to us, to all of us, to help all the people who need it through that door, one family at a time.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:25 p.m. on December 6 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 7.

Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors Reception

December 8, 1996

Thank you very much, and welcome to the White House. Every year Hillary and I look forward to the Kennedy Center honorees coming here, especially because this is such a great season of celebration. Tonight we pay tribute to five performing artists whose work has transformed the landscape of American art.

America is more than the land we live on. It is even more than its people. It is an ideal. Our artists express that ideal and give voice to the common experience. They are the singers of the American soul. Their art challenges us and deepens our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. It is my privilege to welcome them, along with their families and friends, to the White House.

Edward Albee's life epitomizes the rebellious spirit of art. Maybe I ought to repeat that. *[Laughter]* From childhood, he challenged convention. He left college for the streets of New York, where he worked by day and wrote by night. For 10 years he pursued his art with single-minded purpose but without recognition. Then, in only 3 weeks in 1958, he wrote a play that took the American theater by storm and changed it forever, "Zoo Story," a play about a young drifter and a well-to-do stranger who meet on a lonely park bench. It was the first of many plays by Edward Albee that dared us to look at ourselves in the same stark light he turned on our fears, our failings, and our

dreams. For over 40 years, his work has defied convention and set a standard of innovation that few can match. From "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" to "Tiny Alice" to "Three Tall Women," his plays have invigorated the American theater and inspired a new generation of playwrights to do the same.

Tonight our Nation, born in rebellion, pays tribute to you, Edward Albee. In your rebellion, the American theater was reborn.

Bennett Leslie Carter was born in the tough New York neighborhood that became the site of the Lincoln Center, where eight decades later he would be cheered to the rafters. From the small clubs of the Harlem Renaissance where he began playing saxophone to world tours for the biggest of the big bands, Benny Carter redefined American jazz. From the start, his fellow musicians said the way he played the sax was amazing. They say that about me, too. *[Laughter]* But I don't think they mean it in quite the same way. *[Laughter]*

Benny Carter's influence on jazz is immeasurable. Whether he played with them or not, all the great bands used his arrangements. He virtually arranged the Swing Era, and his rhythms have set feet tapping all over the world. Indeed, on our recent trip to Thailand when Hillary and I visited with the King and Queen—the King, as some of you may know, is one of the world's greatest jazz fans—and 3 minutes